

## Wave of coronavirus conspiracies might be ‘just as dangerous for societies as the outbreak itself’

The coronavirus has given rise to a flood of conspiracy theories, disinformation and propaganda, eroding public trust and undermining health officials in ways that could elongate and even outlast the pandemic.

Claims that the virus is a foreign bioweapon, a partisan invention or part of a plot to re-engineer the population have replaced a mindless virus with more familiar, comprehensible villains.

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Rumors and patently unbelievable claims are spread by everyday people whose critical faculties have simply been overwhelmed, psychologists say, by feelings of confusion and helplessness.

But many false claims are also being promoted by governments looking to [hide](#) their [failures](#), partisan actors seeking political benefit, run-of-the-mill scammers and, in the United States, a president who has pushed [unproven cures](#) and [blame-deflecting falsehoods](#).

The conspiracy theories all carry a common message: The only protection comes from possessing the secret truths that “they” don’t want you to hear.

The feelings of security and control offered by such rumors may be illusory, but the damage to the public trust is all too real.

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The wave of coronavirus conspiracies, [psychologists] Dr. [Daniel] Jolley and Dr. [Pia] Lamberty wrote, “has the potential to be just as dangerous for societies as the outbreak itself.”

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